192. Constitutional reforms with special reference to the reconstitution of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly.

MR. N. MADHAVAN NAIR (*Member, Trivandrum taluk, Group II*) said that the most noteworthy feature of the political reforms initiated during the illustrious reign of His Highness the late Maharaja was the promulgation of the Legislative Council Regulation II of 1097. The new Council as constituted under the Regulation was the embodiment of the largest measure of constitutional reform inaugurated by any Indian State.

But in spite of the very progressive nature of the Regulation, it imposed several restrictions on the rights of the Council. The number of reserved subjects under Section 11 was unnecessarily large. By virtue of this Section, subjects of supreme importance like the development of harbours, extension of railways, and reform of the currency were removed from the scope of the Council. The Section should be made more liberal and probably the only subjects that should be reserved should be matters relating to the Ruling Family and treaties with the Paramount Power. The list of demands not votable by the Council in the discussion of the Budget should also be reduced. Particularly, the salaries and allowances of all officers should be made votable by the Council. The right of asking supplementary questions should be given to all members and not merely to the person who put the original question. The Council should be given the right of electing the president from among the elected members, and the president should have only a casting vote. The number of members elected by the general constituencies should be raised so as to give them a clear majority in the Council.

So far as the Assembly was concerned, it should be reconstituted on a statutory basis with a broader franchise. The Assembly should be given the power of asking questions and moving resolutions. It should have control of the finances and all measures connected with taxation should receive its assent before they were accepted by Government. It should have the power of general discussion of the annual Budget and the legislative programme of every year should be placed before it for its approval. It should have the power to discuss the Dewan's address and vote upon it.

The establishment of an Executive Council was another measure that was absolutely necessary. The age of one-man rule had long since passed away. What was now wanted was a responsible body of ministers. They should be responsible to the Legislative Council and the Popular Assembly. Each of the ministers should be in charge of a separate portfolio. They should hold office only so long as they had the confidence of the Council as well as the Assembly.

The problem of evolving a perfect scheme of responsible government was indeed a hard one. It could best be done through a mixed committee of officials and non-officials.

193. Reform of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly.

MR. M. N. PARAMESVARAN PILLAI (*Member, Municipal Council, Trivandrum*) said that the Assembly, as it was originally constituted, was intended to be a very useful body. It was designed to give the people an opportunity of expressing their wants and wishes direct to Government. It was also to enable them to represent to Government their views on the various administrative measures adopted by the Government from time to time. No subjects were at that time excluded from the purview of the Assembly. The qualifications for membership in the Assembly were of the simplest kind. The Assembly had also the power of asking questions. But all these were changed subsequently. All kinds of revised rules were introduced and the rights and privileges of the house were curtailed.

In spite of these retrograde measures the Assembly continued to do very useful work. The abolition of taxation in kind, the expansion of the powers of the Legislative Council, the advancement of social legislation, the inauguration of several educational reforms, the extension of railways, the Revenue-Devaswom separation, these were but a few of the most beneficial measures which could be traced to the direct influence of the Assembly. No less a person than the late Sir P. Rajagopalachari had paid a very glowing tribute to the Assembly in the following terms :

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"Travancore has in this Assembly an institution which with judicious development might be made most useful for purposes of good government". Mr. Raghaviah however, wanted to reduce the powers of the Assembly. Fortunately his attempts in that direction ended in a fiasco The present Dewan promised to revise the constitution and powers of the Assembly ; but nothing was done yet.

The following were the suggestions that the member had to make in the matter :—

(1) The Assembly should be given a statutory basis ;

(2) All legislative measures should be placed before the Assembly for general discussion, and the opinions recorded by the Assembly should be communicated to the Legislative Council ;

(3) The Assembly should have the power of discussing the State Budget before it was placed before the Legislative Council ;

(4) The liberty of the members as to the choice of subjects should be unrestricted ;

(5) All measures of new taxation, including raising of existing taxes, should be voted upon by the Assembly ;

(6) The right of moving resolutions on matters of public interest should be granted to the Assembly and resolutions passed by it, should, when approved by the Council, be binding on Government ;

(7) The right of interpellation should be expressly granted to the Assembly ;

(8) The qualifications for the franchise should be lowered ;

(9) Definite rules should be framed as regards nomination of members to the Assembly.

194. Reform of the Legislative Council.

Mr. R. RAMAN PILLAI (*Member, Quilon taluk, Group II*) said that the present non-official majority in the Legislative Council was not real but only nominal. Of the twenty-eight elected members, five were elected by special constituencies and only twenty-three by the general constituencies. But the representatives of the special constituencies generally threw in their lot with Government, whenever a question arose as between Government and the non-official side. The general constituencies should therefore be given a majority in the Council.

Secondly, persons having any kind of financial transactions with Government should be disqualified for membership in the Council, for no opposition to Government could be expected of a member who was a printer of Government publications or a contractor under Government.

Thirdly, the Dewan should not be the president of the Council, and the deputy president should be elected by the members.

Fourthly, the power of making rules under the Legislative Council Regulation should be vested in the Legislative Council.

Fifthly, the subjects excluded from the right of interpellation should be reduced, and supplementary questions should be allowed to be asked by all members.

Sixthly, as regards resolutions, there should be a rule compelling Government to place in every meeting a statement of action taken on the resolutions passed and the reasons in cases where no action was taken. The subjects excluded from the scope of resolutions should be reduced.

Seventhly, in regard to the Budget discussion, the sanction of the Council should be necessary not only for expenditure but also for revenue. The distinction between votable and non-votable expenditure should be abolished. No scheme of public utility involving large interests and great initial outlay should be started without the previous sanction of the Council and no alienation of the natural resources of the State should be made without 75 per cent of the members of the Council rising to it.

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